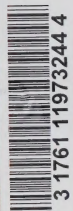


CA2&N CR 90

- 76A16



3 1761 11973244 4



Ministry of  
Culture and  
Recreation

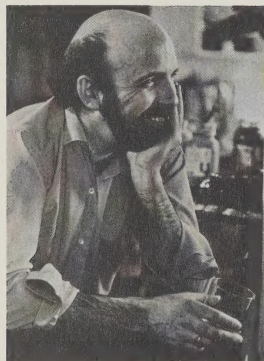
Sports and  
Fitness  
Division

Hon. Robert Welch  
Minister  
Robert Johnston  
Deputy Minister

# ACRYLICS

Government  
Publications





## BIOGRAPHY

Ron Bolt lives in Toronto with his wife and two children. He spent twelve years as art director and graphic designer in the advertising field before leaving the business world five years ago to paint full time.


He has taught drawing and painting to adults at night school courses including a course he designed and administered at the Learning Resources Centre in Toronto. He also spent two summers teaching children in an outport school in Newfoundland.

Ron Bolt's paintings, drawings and prints can be seen in many public and private collections throughout Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. He is represented in Toronto by Roberts Gallery, and by other galleries in major cities across Canada.

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1	Drying Properties	35
SEEING	2	Durability	35
EXPERIENCING	9	Consistency	36
Line	9	Gloss and Matte Media	36
Form	11	Gel Media	38
Colour	14	Synthetic Gesso	38
Possibilities of Tonal Variation	15	Summation of the Acrylic Medium	39
Tonal Contrast	16	Advantages of Acrylics Over Oils	39
Texture	22	Use of Acrylics as Oils	40
Rhythm	23	Use of Acrylics as Watercolour	42
Composition	24	Painting Surfaces	43
Positive and Negative Space	30	Analysis of Two Paintings	48
Contrast	32	The Creative Process	49
DOING	34	Analysis of the Painting "Winterrock"	50
The Synthetic Media	34	Analysis of the Painting "Spring Chestnuts"	56
Characteristics of Acrylic Paints	34	Summary	61
Toxicity	35	Conclusion	61





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2024 with funding from  
University of Toronto

<https://archive.org/details/31761119732444>



# INTRODUCTION

This book focusses on painting in acrylics but starts off in a more general vein with a discussion of how to look at things. As its title suggests, the first section is a useful guide toward discovering what you see and wish to express about the landscape around you, rather than a step-by-step manual that will enable you to produce what an art teacher would consider a technically good painting. Second comes a consideration of the basic tools and principles of art, how they can be used and their potential towards experiencing a greater awareness of what is seen. Third, practical hints and working methods are presented, not to be accepted as firm do's and don'ts but as starting points from which you must depart on your own journey of personal discovery.

Before you gather your expeditionary forces and leap off to discover new visual delights, may I set you up in the proper frame of mind by recommending to your consideration the following three statements.

1. The practice of any art, visual or otherwise, is an attempt on the part of the practitioner to express his personal viewpoint. Therefore, if an object does not express the personal viewpoint of its creator, it is not a work of art.
2. In creating an art object, be it a painting, a book, or a symphony, as far as the creator is concerned it is not the end result that is important, but the creative process that went before. So don't concern yourself with painting a masterpiece. Enjoy the creative process for its own sake.
3. All rules in art are made to be broken -- providing you have a valid enough reason for breaking them.

And away we go!

# SEEING

Each person sees the things around him differently than everyone else because he programs into what he sees the sum total of who he is. There is no universal reality, only a personal one and stretching this point further, all art is an illusion.

It is also true that in the case of the person with what the artist would consider an untrained eye, he takes for granted what he sees and in fact does not really see anything that stimulates his senses or emotions or nudges him into anything other than a surface appreciation of the world around him. It is the function of the artist to shake up the viewer in order that he will see something that he hadn't experienced before.

To illustrate the point that people really do take for granted what they are looking at, here is an experiment that you can try that might shake you up a bit.

I first discovered this trick in reading E. H. Gombrich's book "Art and Illusion" distributed by Pantheon Books Inc. 22 E. 51st Street, New York, N. Y. 10022. I highly recommend it to you.

Gombrich asks you to stand in front of your bathroom mirror, turn the hot water tap on to create steam and mist up the mirror. At the point when you can barely see your own reflection, use your hand to clear away

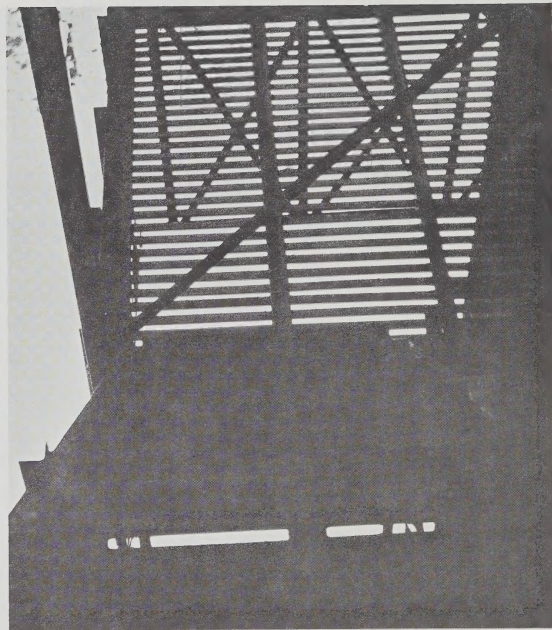
the mist from that part of the mirror taken up by the reflection of your own head. This process, as silly as it sounds, forces on you the realization of a visual fact that many people have by-passed or ignored. When you look in the mirror you automatically assume that you are looking at an exact duplication of yourself in natural size. As you complete wiping away the oval shape of your head in the mirror, you will discover that the image is exactly half the size of your own head. The rough geometry of the situation is this. Since the mirror will always appear to be halfway between you and your reflection, the size of the reflection on its surface will be one half of the apparent size, or the size your eyes tell you it should be.

Now, let us take this idea that much of what we see is not experienced fully but taken for granted, and apply it to looking at, and eventually painting, the landscape.

The artist sees things not in terms of the conventional understanding of the phrase everyday reality but in terms of color, line, form, rhythm, and texture. He allows these kinds of visual stimulation to affect his emotions and by applying his own techniques, style and craftsmanship, creates a record of his personal reality.

Here are four examples of what I mean when I say the artist looks at things in terms of color, line, form, texture and rhythm first.

The first photo is the bark of a tree. Look at the immense detail of pattern, form and texture. There is a universe of visual information contained in a 12 inch square section of nature that just happens to be a part of a tree trunk.



The second photograph is a close-up of a fire-escape. To me, it has symmetry, strength, and the ominous quality reminiscent of medieval armour. If you allow your imagination free reign, the lowly sewer cover, because of its form and symmetry can send you on flights of fancy far beyond the meaning of its surface reality.



Number three is tall grass, and is essentially an example of line and its many possibilities. Look at where the lines go. Trace them with your fingers. See how they overlap and form an abstract pattern first, and then the image of a patch of grass. If you can analyse and then draw that pattern of lines you create the illu-

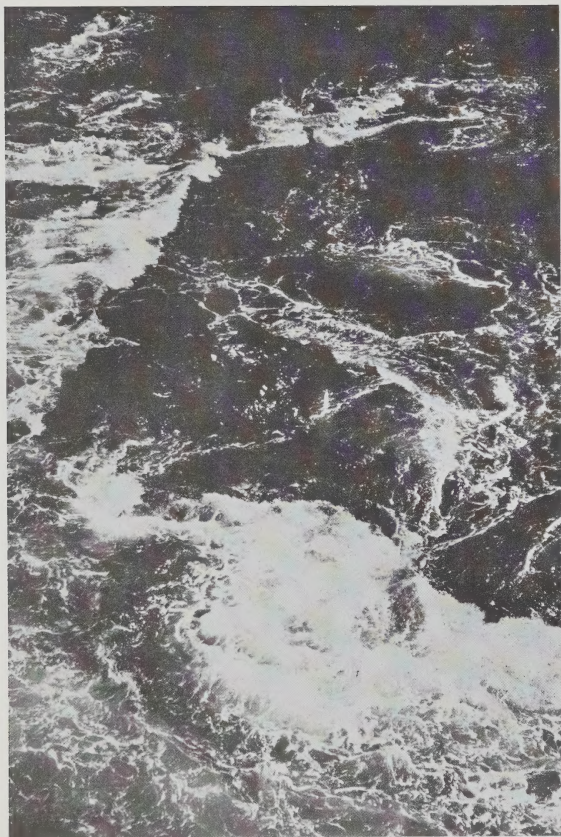
sion of a patch of grass.

The fourth shot is a section of city pavement and a tree trunk, illustrating several different but closely related textures, some man-made and some organic.









The fifth shot is a photograph taken looking straight down into the ocean. Trace the swirling patterns of salt and surf. See how they take your eyes on a visual journey up and down and in and out of the photograph. That's rhythm!

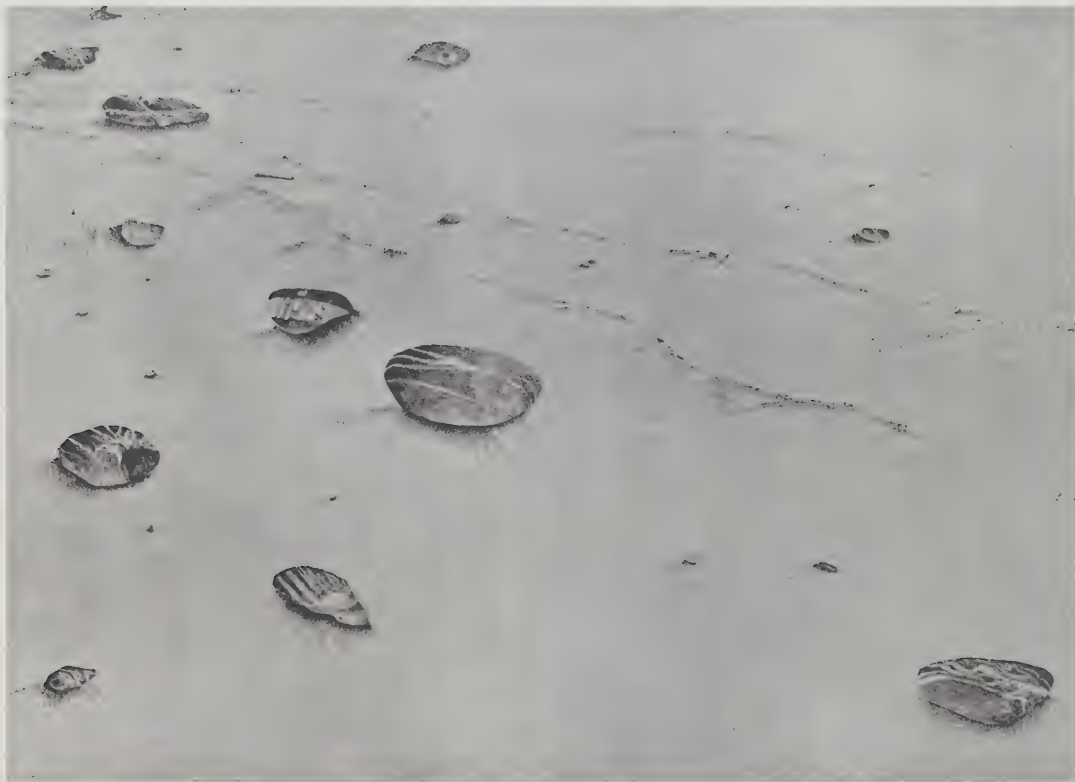
Artists, like everyone else, not only see, they smell, touch, taste and hear. Have you ever rubbed your hand hard and quickly over the bark of an old pine tree? It hurts! It hurts because the bark is rough and heavily textured. Paint it that way. An instructor when criticizing a student's painting of a still life grouping, pointed out that the student had painted sweet yellow oranges rather than lemons.

"Lemons taste sour" the instructor said, "so paint them sour."

The next time you pick up a pebble on the beach, consider that you are looking at something that is actually millions of years old. That pebble is the result of tremendous natural forces of fire, wind, water, snow, ice, rain and movement. It holds the basic secrets of how the world was formed. Draw it with care and imagination and a sense of the mysteries it represents. Before you begin, rub the pebble in your hands and feel how smooth it is and how cold it seems. Put that smoothness and coolness into your drawing.

Now it's easy enough for me to tell you to put smoothness and coolness into that drawing of the pebble but that is all I can do. I can't tell you actually how to do it. The next chapter will give you some basic exer-





Ron Bolt, SAND PEBBLES, Pencil on illustration board,  $23\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $29\frac{1}{2}$ "

cises in how to transfer your emotions to your hand and thus to paper. From that point you are on your own with your own understanding of what that pebble means to you. Even if I could tell you how to put smoothness and coolness into your drawing of the pebble it wouldn't be your drawing anymore. It would be mine because it would be my understanding of coolness and smoothness, not yours.

Start looking at things beyond their surface reality and begin to search for what they really mean to you. Only when you have a personal reason for painting a subject will that painting have a communicative power. And that communicative power transcends in many respects, sloppiness of technique and awkwardness of draftmanship. Van Gogh's *Potato Eaters* is not an exercise in how to define the human figure in terms of a visual reality but it does force the viewer into facing the reality of what those people were really like.

Before going on to actual practical work, let's review the process of looking and seeing.

- Try to look at things around you as if you were seeing them for the first time.
- Don't take anything for granted and don't trust first impressions. Look and then look again.
- Look at things in terms of the five basic tools of the artist – form, color, line, texture and rhythm.
- Try to arrive at a personal viewpoint about what you're looking at and try to say something about it in your work.
- There is a Chinese proverb that goes "We see with our ears." Use all your senses when you look at nature.

# EXPERIENCING

The five basic tools of the artist are line, form, color, rhythm, and texture. These combined with composition and the principle of contrast (both of which are discussed later in this chapter) are the building blocks of any art object. Let us discuss them one at a time and see how they can be used. Let us consider how their potential for expression can be developed to a finer pitch so that, through them, you may heighten your awareness of what you see.

There will be visual problems given in each category. Various solutions to these problems are presented at the back of this book. Try the problems yourself first, before you look at the solutions provided. I am indebted to Johannes Itten's book "Design and Form - The Basic Course at the Bauhaus" published by Reinhold publishing, New York, for much of the practical work suggested in this chapter.

## LINE

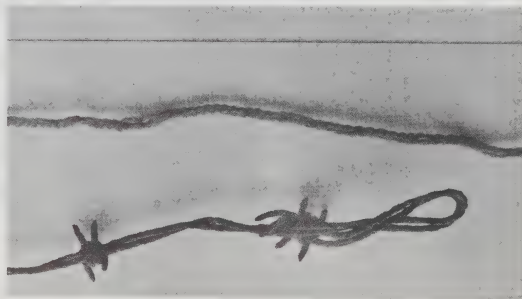
Paul Klee, the noted 20th century Swiss artist, once defined a drawing as the result of having taken a line for a walk.

Line defines form. There are some subjects that cannot be approached in any but a linear way.

The painting on the following page is an example.

The character of line defines emotion as well as form. It would be self-defeating to do a drawing of a young girl in a heavy scratchy line, unless, of course, the girl was a war orphan and the artist wished to get across the pathetic quality of her existence. Similarly, the character of an old dead tree cannot be captured using a lithe, sinuous line.

Here is a visual problem concerned with the emotional sensual possibilities of line. Draw three lines side by side, using conte crayon or a 4B (very soft) pencil on a slightly textured (cartridge) paper. The first line should represent a length of thread, the second line a strand of fibrous twine, and the third a piece of barbed wire. Before you begin, think of the different







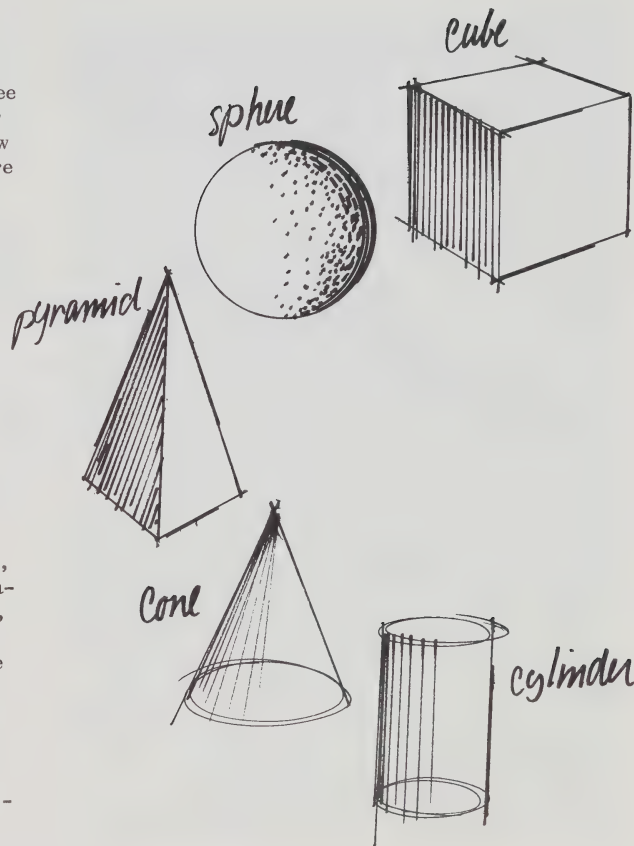
Ron Bolt, WINTERGRASSE NO. 10, Acrylic on stretched canvas, 28" x 34"

tactile qualities of these materials. What would happen to your hand if you gripped a piece of barbed wire and pulled? Consider the strength of a piece of thread and the hairiness of twine. Now, draw three lines representing those characteristics. Don't draw pictures of thread, twine and barbed wire - draw how they feel to you. When you've had a chance to explore the ramifications of the problem on your own, compare your results with the solutions presented on Page 63.

## FORM

Everything in nature, whether it be a tree, clouds in the sky, a flower, a barn or a beer bottle can be analyzed down to a combination of one or all of the following shapes. The sphere, the cone, the cylinder, the cube and the pyramid. There are of course, variations on these shapes such as the oval, the rectangle, the pentagon, the tetrahedron and so on, but for the purposes of this discussion, let us concentrate on the five basic ones.

Consider the simple tree branch. You may certainly approach it in a simple two-dimensional manner as a linear pattern or in a three-dimensional way considering its complexity of form.



As you can see, I've analyzed it down to a series of cylinders of various shapes and sizes. The point here is that when the branch is considered as form, it must be considered as a three-dimensional object and subject to the play of light and shade because there can be no form without light. Light always follows the

contour of the form. The edges of the form closest to the source of light are obviously going to be brighter than those that are hidden from the light source.





Look out your kitchen window and analyze what you see down to the five basic shapes. Here are some examples.

Visual problem. Here is a photo of a deceptively simple wine bottle. Draw it in three-dimensions as a series of transparent forms as the drawings above suggest. Remember, every time the interlocking contour of the object changes, a new form has been introduced. Try to get the proportions between the various forms correct. Relate the size of one form to its adjoining form. To help you grapple with the problem, I will tell you that there are no less than 6 separate and distinct forms combined within this seemingly simple form. My analysis of the bottle appears on page 64.

Analysis of form in drawing is one of the greatest aids I know of to train your eye to appreciate the complexities of form in nature. Try various objects around the house and subject them to this process of form analysis. The more analysis of form you do, the more you will begin to really see the possibilities of the landscape around you.

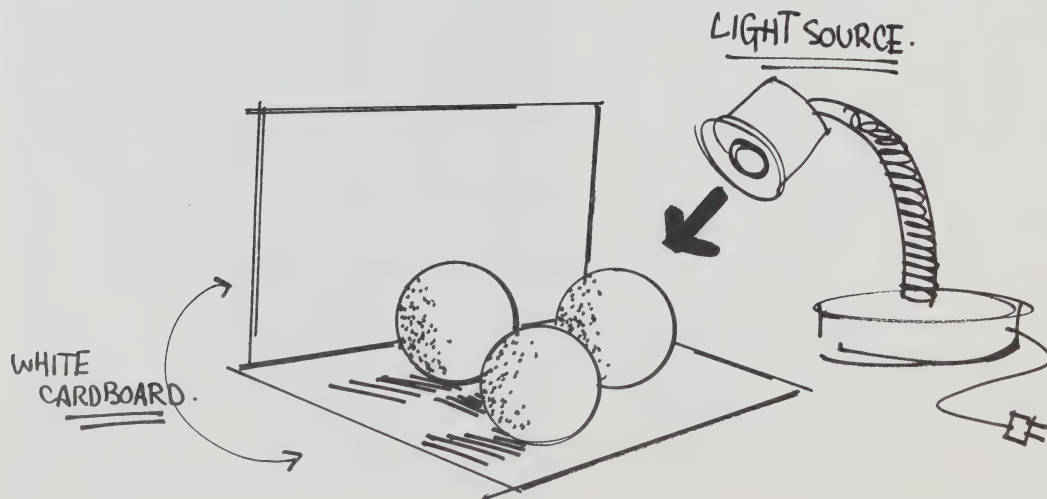
**Form Exercise 1.** Find a dead tree and analyze it into a series of cylinders as shown in the drawing of the tree branch on page      Remember, every time the branch or tree trunk changes direction, a new cylinder is introduced. Try in your drawing to show the direction of the form. Is it going away from you or jutting out at you?



Form Exercise 2. Tonal relationships. Place three oranges on a plain surface and project a strong light source on them from one direction. Notice how the heavy light accentuates the roundness of the objects and their texture. Now do a drawing of these three forms as an exercise in the realization of three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface.

## COLOUR

Because this book is printed in black and white, any practical examples of color relationships are not possible so we must talk in theoretical terms rather than in practical ones. However, we can be more



visually specific in discussing tone, tonal contrast and the principles of light and dark.

#### POSSIBILITIES OF TONAL VARIATION

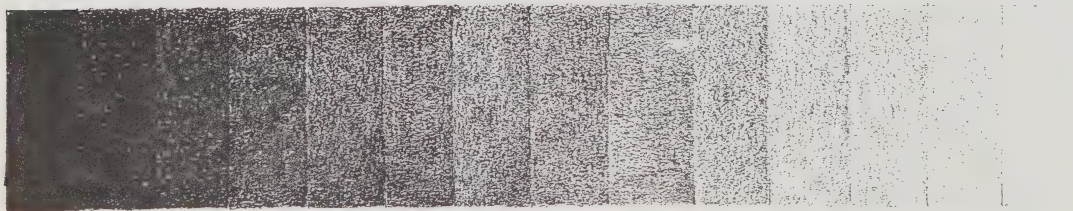
Tonal variation (the darkness or lightness of color, or the value of color) in nature is infinite. However, the beginning artist, because his eye is untrained, can recognize only a very narrow range of tones somewhat in the middle of the tonal range. Because he is dealing with so few tones, the student's work seems to lack strength of contrast, strength of form, and suffers from overall wishy-washiness.

Problem - To stretch your appreciation of the many tones available to you, try this exercise. Materials needed include a ruler or straight edge of some kind, sharp, pointed, 2H (hard) and 2B (soft) pencils and a piece of white cartridge paper or lightly textured paper. Do not use newsprint as it is too smooth to pick up the pencil effectively and too brown to make the

most of the contrasts available.

Using your ruler and 2H pencil, very lightly lay out a series of rectangles about 1" by  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " and number them 1 to 12. (See example) Number 1 will remain the color of the white paper. Number 12 will be as dark or as black as you can make it. Now, construct a graduating scale of pure tones from light to dark. Try to make them as even in their progression as possible and try to keep each separate tone as clean and uniform within itself as possible, in order to get the maximum contrast with the ones adjacent to it.

When you've got that done (it should take you at least an hour and a half) try building up a series of tones beginning with the lightest tone your pencil will make, progressing through as many separate tones as possible to jet black. See how many distinctly different tones you can create. Talented students with patience have been able to assemble over 40 subtly different tones in a row. When you can do that, you will be surprised at how much more of the subtlety of nature you begin to see and experience.



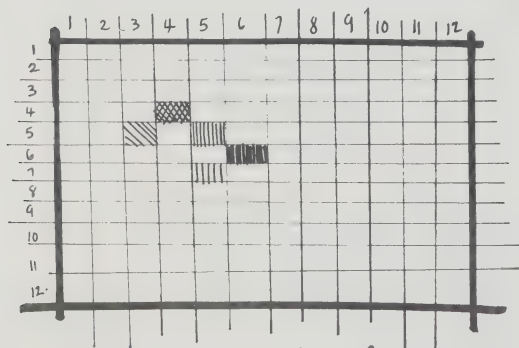
## TONAL CONTRAST

Question – How can you make something look really dark in a painting other than relying on painting it a very dark color?

Answer – Put something very light directly beside it.

Simple – right? Right! Yet this principle of contrast often escapes people because their appreciation of the full tonal range is so limited. Now that you have completed your tonal scale of at least 25 tones, here is another problem.

From magazines around your house, find a color photo of a landscape, group of people, interior of a



*Building up a tonal analysis of a black and white photo.*

house or whatever. The only criterion is that it be large and reasonably tonally complicated. Take that photographic reproduction and by intersecting lines drawn on it, divide it up into a series of rectangles twelve deep and twelve wide (See example).

When you have divided your photograph, analyze each square not for its intensity of color but for its tonal relationship to that tonal scale that you have recently completed. Draw a corresponding set of squares the same size on a piece of cartridge paper and fill in each square with the corresponding tone of the photograph. When you have completed all the squares, you will have a tonal analysis of the photograph. Better still, go to your library and find a color reproduction of a classic painting by an artist such as Tintoretto or Titian. They were absolute masters of tonal contrast. Try the above exercise using tracing paper so as not to ruin the library book. The more squares you divide the painting into, the more your finished tonal analysis will resemble the painting.

## COLOR

As with tone, the beginner's appreciation of the vastness of color is limited and hence his paintings seem perhaps muddy or dull or raw. Here are three exercises that if done diligently will greatly expand your ability to see and experience color, and to interpret it when dealing with your own painting.

**Exercise 1.** Using the same idea as the black and white tonal scale that you did earlier in pencil, construct a scale of color blocks progressing



from red through to yellow using only one red and one yellow, working with a pointed sable brush. See how many different hues you can realize. You can use acrylic on paper or illustration board, or oil on canvas board. You will probably find as you have already found in the construction of the black and white scale, that you are constantly moving back and forth within the scale, adjusting one block with another.

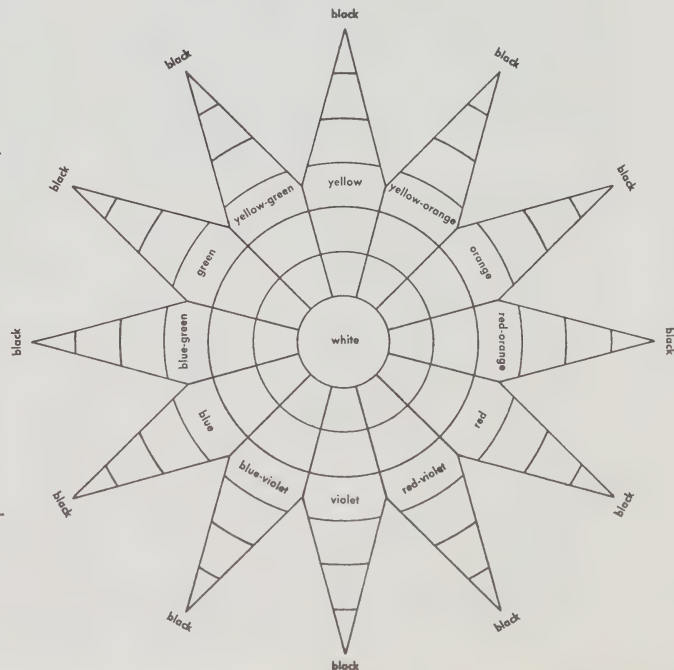
**Exercise 2.** Tonal variations in color. Do a similar scale construction using black, white and one of the primary colors (red, yellow or blue). Starting with white and adding the color, see how many tones you can get as you add black to the pure color until you arrive at pure black.

**Exercise 3.** This is the color star developed by Johannes Itten at the Bauhaus, an advanced school of art, design and technology that existed in Germany in the 1920's and 30's. For further investigations of the theory of color, may I recommend Itten's book "The Art of Color" published by Reinhold Publishing Corporation, New York.

The labelled ring of hues can be obtained by the mixture of the three primary colors. The blocks proceeding from the individual hues to the centre ring are achieved with the addition of white to the hue and are called tints. They should be as even in progression as you can make them. One way to test their evenness is to squint your eyes. If any tone in the row stands out

above any other, it is wrong and must be adjusted accordingly.

The blocks proceeding from the hues to the points of the star are realized by adding black to the individual hue, and are called shades. Again the progression to



black should be as even as you can make it.

To construct your own large star on paper, place a sheet of tracing paper over the segment of the star represented in Figure (O) and by moving the tracing paper so that you continue to repeat that figure twelve times side by side, you will arrive at a large tracing of the complete color star which you can in turn (by covering the back of the tracing with graphite from a 2B pencil) trace on to illustration board or a canvas depending on whether you are using acrylic or oil.

Here are the three colors I recommend that you use. They are designers colors (water soluble) although the names will probably guide you to very similar colors in acrylic or oil.

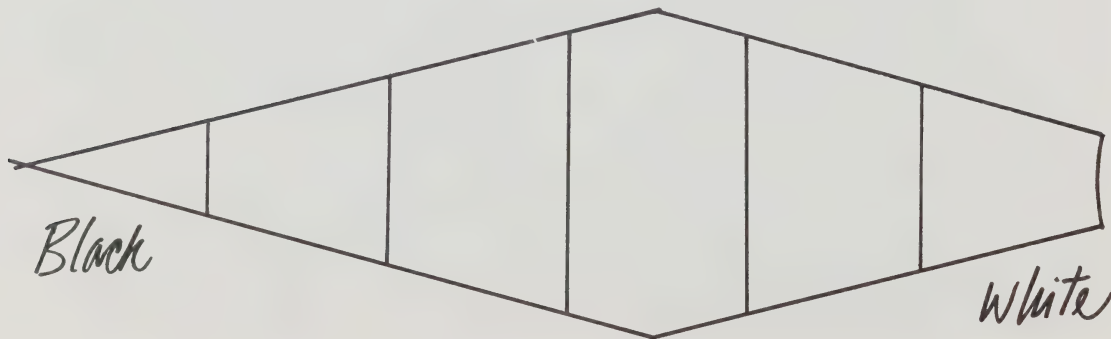
Yellow - cadmium pale  
Red - cadmium lake  
Blue - turquoise blue

Use only these three colors plus black and white.

There is no combination of three primaries that will give you perfect results throughout the whole color star. You will find with the above combination that your red purple range will tend to be muddy. However if we changed the blue or red to accommodate this range, we would adversely affect some other perhaps larger part of the star.

Whatever you do, don't use a Prussian or phthalo blue or a dark red. If you do, over half your star will be mud.

The end result makes a very attractive design and as you near completion of Itten's Color Star, you will begin to notice the pulsating effect emanating from the central region. The more you look at it, the more you have difficulty in deciding whether it is coming out at you (convex) or going away from you (concave).



## SOME DEFINITIONS AND HINTS ABOUT COLOR

When artists talk about color they use the following vocabulary.

Chrome or Chroma - means color as opposed to black, grey or white.

Complementary Colors - are those colors found opposite each other on the color circle, such as blue and orange or yellow-green and red-violet. (See the labelled core ring of the color star on page 17.

When put side by side, complementary colors heighten each other's chrome, or intensify each other to the greatest possible brilliance available within the combination. A flicker or visual vibration is created. This visual phenomenon was used to great advantage by the Impressionists (French Painters of the late 19th century) who used small dots of complementary colors side by side to create the shimmering qualities of pure light. Recently the op artists have capitalized on the complementary effect using bold patterns to create optical tricks and stunning statements of pure line and color (See example on page 20)

When complementary colors are mixed together, they destroy each other's chrome and the result is grey. Used judiciously, this principle allows one to grey a color without using pure black, thus avoiding the

somewhat washed out effect that black tends to produce.

Cool Colors and Warm Colors - This principle tends to be a subjective decision on the part of the artist and the viewer. It is obvious to say that the warm colors are on the red-yellow side of the color wheel and that the cold colors can be found within the blue-green range. However, there are also warm blues and cold reds and yellows. Colors appear cold or warm in juxtaposition with other colors and the whole principle of color temperature is subject to individual interpretation.

Hue - The color of the color - red, green, turquoise, etc. regardless of whether there is black or white in the color.

Primary Colors - Colors that cannot be mixed but exist theoretically in a pure state. These are the colors that if mixed together in various combinations with the addition of black and white, will produce all other colors. (This is a theoretical statement because no one can define the exact red or yellow or blue.)

The primary colors then are red, yellow and blue, with the addition of green, depending on whose color theory you wish to adopt.

Secondary Colors - Again, depending on which theory, they are green, orange and violet --



Kathleen Johnson  
LIGHT MATTER  
Four stretched canvases  
40" x 40"  
Reproduction  
courtesy of the artist



or the results of the first sequential combination of the primaries.

Shade - Color darkened by the use of black.

Tint - Color heightened by the use of white.

Tone - A word used to describe the darkness or lightness of any color after the addition of black, white, or its complementary color.

Value - Another word for tone.

### THREE MORE POINTS ABOUT COLOR

Black - Theoretically speaking, black is the absence of all light. Practically speaking,

I find black a deadly, numbing substance that if over-mixed with colors, will suck all the hue out of a painting. I much prefer to darken colors with the addition of a 'black' that I have mixed myself. Here are two recipes for blacks. Prussian blue (oil) or phthalo blue (acrylic) mixed with raw umber. Alizarin crimson and viridian. Experiment and discover some of your own blacks. Then you can begin to experience warm and cold blacks.

When talking about black, I always remember an experience I had in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. I came upon a black canvas by the American painter, Lester Johnson.

"Oh, Oh," I said, "Painting has come to the end of the line." However, upon closer inspection, that large black canvas wasn't black at all but a series of nine equal squares three wide and three deep, forming a larger square. Each of the nine squares was a different color of black and I spent a considerable amount of time in front of that picture revelling in the subtle relationship of one black to another.

In painting, there is no such thing as 'black' black!

White - Theoretically, white is pure light or the combination of all the colors of the rainbow. If the color wheel was spun fast enough, all the colors on it, no matter how complicated the color wheel, would dissolve into pure light - or white. However, in a practical sense, light cannot be instilled into a painting by the use of white pigment, although attempts have been made with metallic pigments. Light, or the sense of brilliance is a matter of contrast of color one with another. White pigment only lessens the hue or the power of saturated color.

Shadows - A curious fact of shadows in nature is that they always contain a mixture of the colors from what the shadow is being cast on and what it is being cast from. In other words, if you come across a shadow cast on green grass from a pink boulder, the color of the shadow should contain elements of the colors of the grass and

the pink boulder. This fact is not necessarily true when dealing with still life set-ups in the studio, because the light source is sometimes an artificial one which changes a lot of things. However, you can use this principle to great advantage in still life painting even though it might not be a reality.

# TEXTURE

The use of texture in a painting allows you to experience what things feel like. They allow the viewer to "touch with his eyes." Everything in nature has a texture of some kind or other and it is up to you to experience that texture for a more complete understanding of whatever it is you wish to paint. Here are some exercises that will hopefully expand your tactile reception capabilities.

## Exercise 1. Textural Collage

From a collection of different color magazines, cut out different shapes of pure texture. Don't cut out pictures of things. Look for patches of adjectives like prickly, smooth, squishy or stony. Paste your collection of textures on a 12" square in the centre of a larger piece of white paper, making sure to cover every bit of white paper within the square. See how many

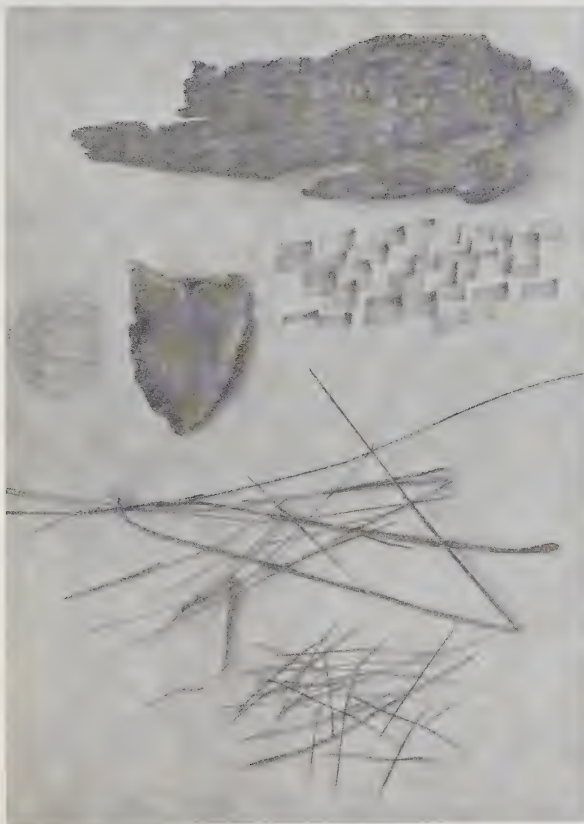
different qualities of texture you can realize and how those qualities can be heightened by contrast. See one possible solution on page 65.

## Exercise 2. How to Make a Texture-Times-Twelve Box

Get an egg carton and throw away the folding top. Paint the bottom white over all and glue it to a larger white board. Now, go out on a walking trip and find twelve different pieces of nature that have twelve different textural qualities. For example: Dead grass, live grass, a piece of granite, a small pebble from a gravel road, a fuzzy leaf of a weed, a smooth hardwood leaf, and six others. Arrange your objects in the compartments of the egg carton in any way that pleases you and hang the result in your studio as a visual reminder of the variety of textures in nature. Better still, make a much larger Texture-Times-One-Hundred and Twenty-Four Box using a combination of man-made and organic materials.

## Exercise 3.

Construct with your 2H pencil a series of five 3" squares 1/2" apart. Consider what the following adjectives mean to you; itchy, sandy, rocky, glassy, grassy. Now fill each square using conte crayon or a 4B pencil, with one of the textural qualities mentioned above. Don't draw a picture of grass, or rocks or sand. Draw the feeling of the texture. When you com-



plete your five squares, text yourself by asking some unknowing relative or bystander to identify which texture is which, after you have given him a list of the five possibilities. You might be surprised to find that your friend will say, "That looks like grass." If he does, you've succeeded in your task, because if you draw the textural feeling of grass in a meaningful and thoughtful way, it's more than likely you will wind up with a reasonable visual impression of grass, but a much stronger one than if you began by simply trying to reproduce the surface visual reality of grass.

## RHYTHM

Everyone has his own innate sense of rhythm. People move in different ways. Some slowly, some quickly or jerkily, and some in a lazy manner. Therefore everyone appreciates what rhythm is in a different way. Art teachers have tried to generalize and make sweeping statements like, "Horizontal rhythms create a sense of peace, vertical rhythms evoke a spiritual feeling, and diagonal rhythms produce movement and energy." These explanations, although very neat, are much too simplistic and approach the pictorial understanding of rhythm from the wrong viewpoint. There are no formulas that hold true in all cases because everybody is different - thank goodness!

Everything in nature is necessary to the existence of something else. That dependence, interrelationship and interaction creates rhythms. Consider the roll expressed in the crest of a hill and how the birch trees at the base of the hill depend on that rhythm of the hill for protection from the wind (See page 26). Consider the rhythm in the branches of a tress – particularly a tree that has been subject to the constant buffeting of wind from one direction.

Through investigation and understanding of your own unique kind of rhythm, you can begin to relate in a truer way to the rhythm in nature.

#### Exercise 1.

Take a piece of conte crayon in each hand. Place your hands together in the middle of a large piece of paper and move them out quickly in opposite directions, trying to duplicate in mirror fashion the same design or rhythmic line. Try not to be conscious of what the hand that you most use is doing. Be conscious only of duplicating simultaneously with your other hand what is appearing on the page.

Try this exercise at different speeds and see what variations of rhythmic lines you can create. When you find yourself doing the same thing over and over again, stop and come back to the exercise the next day. It is a great way to start a sketching trip because after you have subconsciously explored in your own sense of rhythm

you can use these visual examples as lead-ins to the rhythms of nature as you encounter them.

#### Exercise 2.

Go through your results of Exercise 1, and see what they suggest to you – perhaps a pair of dancers, or a fence meandering through a field. Try to capitalize on one of your sketches to create something more concrete and meaningful to you, but keep the strong sense of rhythm that you created haphazardly.

Examples of both exercises appear on pages 66 and 67.

## COMPOSITION

We have now discussed the five basic tools of the artist – line, color, form, texture and rhythm. Not all artists rely on all five in equal measure. In some cases, color and rhythm are pre-eminent (Matisse and Chagall). Others are attracted to line (Bernard Buffet), others to an almost total involvement with form (Henry Moore, Juan Miro). However, all artists, (after the initial excitement of the emotional, sensual impression) engage in an intellectual process of organization, a sifting of visual impressions, a process of elimination of non-essential elements. In other words the process of composition begins.





Ron Bolt. THE SUBTLETIES BENEATH NO. 5, Acrylic on canvas, 37 3/4" x 44 3/4"

When the artist composes, he forces his idea into a practical expression. He is faced with the fact of having to work with pigment rather than pure light. He must scale down the size of his vision to meet the size restrictions of the canvas. He must intellectualize his visual thoughts into an ordered form without losing the initial excitement, power and meaning of those thoughts.

Rather than approaching composition from the standpoint of a series of do's and don'ts related to the

system of fulcrum balance and unbalance, consider relating it to the fine art of cooking.

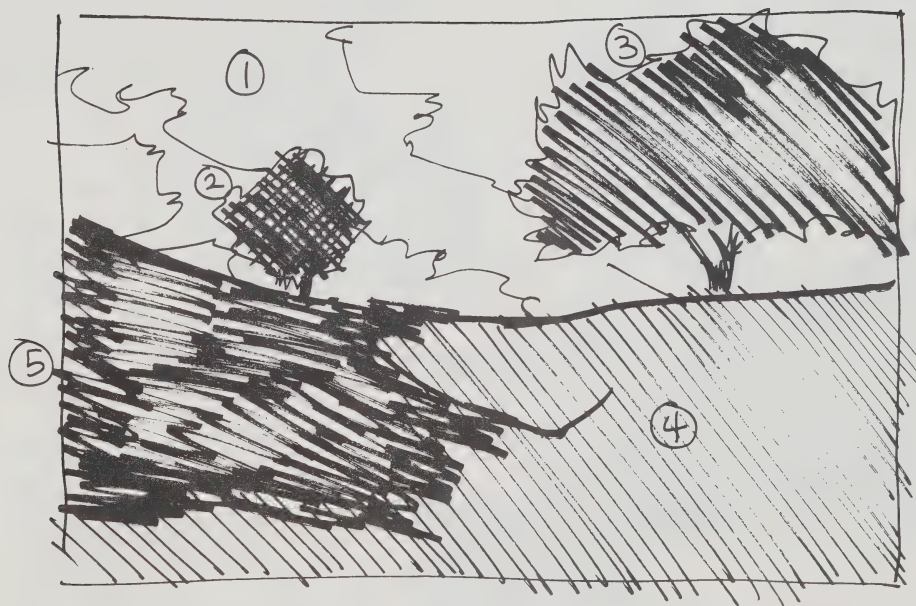
How do you cook potatoes? One way is to peel them, chop them up, put them in a pot, add salt, pepper and butter, screw down the lid and cook for 15 minutes.

Now, let's cook up some visual impressions.

Take one country scene that you have been attracted to through the process already discussed.



Peel away all non-essentials. Chop carefully.



Analysis of 5 basic  
shapes in fig. 17.

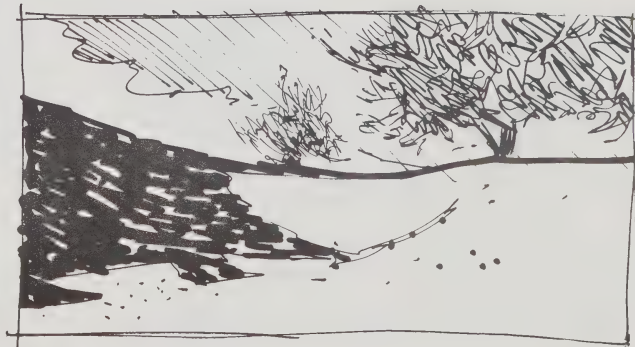
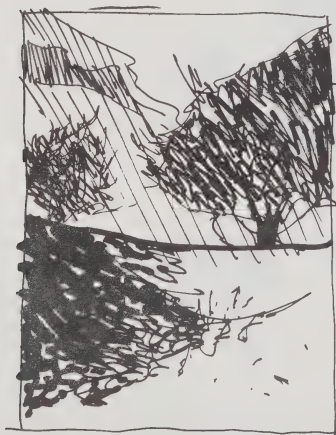


Add seasoning to taste.



Textural and  
rhythmic  
exploration.

Place in pot. The pot in our analogy is the square or rectangular (or spherical or oval) shape that the artist subjects his visual bits and pieces to. He tries various combinations, noting various pressures created within the shape, until he gets the general idea of what he is after. These pressure exercises are sometimes called thumbnail sketches. Gradually the lid gets screwed down tighter and tighter as the artist gradually arrives at his answer.



Transfer to appropriate size of canvas or masonite and cook until well done.

When the artist arrives at the final answer to his organizational problems, he transfers his thumbnail sketch to canvas. This is a crucial point, because what works in a 2" square sketch might not work in a 2 ft. square area of canvas. Sometimes what seems to be a pleasantly unobtrusive space or shape in the small sketch takes on too much importance when it is magnified into the large canvas. So the matter of scale must be taken into consideration and adjustments made accordingly.

## POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SPACE

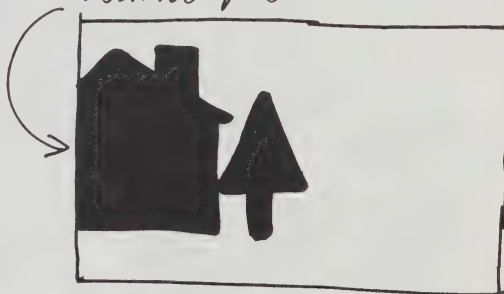
As we have discussed, composition can be related to a pressure system where a great deal is compressed into a relatively small space. But what is space? One puts a shape into a defined space and one immediately creates another shape, the shape of the space around the original shape.

This shape is negative space and is as important to the consideration of a painting as is positive space.

Now, obviously in a landscape painting, every part of the picture is occupied by something, whether it be a barn or a tree or sky or grass. However, beginners usually tend to consider the main parts of a composition, such as a barn or tree as they are

related only to the overall shape of the canvas. What space is left over is usually filled up with texture such as grass or nondescript shapes such as clouds instead of being considered first of all as overall shapes that must be related to all other shapes within the defined areas of the canvas. Only after that initial very important consideration is made, should the shapes of negative space be broken up or textured.

*Positive space*



*Negative space*

## Some Typical Flops in Composition or How to Avoid Disasters in your Studio-Kitchen

Just as cakes fall and roasts burn, paintings flop. Some don't have enough seasoning, some weren't chopped finely enough in the beginning and others are just plain over-cooked.

1. Under-Seasoning or Blandness - Drawing of unrealized textural possibilities.
2. Over-Seasoning - Too much texture to the detriment of the point of the picture.
3. Over-Cooking - Too much of everything.



*Textural possibilities are unrealized. - Bland!*



*Too much texture causes loss of form - Over Seasoned!*



*Too balanced? - Too planned? - Overcooked!*





*Pressure prints are unsettling to the eye.*

(A) *Lines of folds take eye out of picture.*

(B) *Bottle should either run out or be well inside picture*

(C) *Touching contours - either leave more space or own lap.*

(D) *Bottom of bottle hidden by spoon  
Strength of bottle form is lost.*

(E) *Same problem as (B).*

#### 4. Wrong Balance of Ingredients - Creating undue pressure in undesirable areas of the pot.

To sum up this discussion of composition, it cannot be taught by learned formula. What is balanced to some is unbalanced to others. Composition should be considered in terms of your own trained understanding of balanced pressures.

One good way of studying the compositional genius of the masters is to see what happens to their pictures when you use your thumb to block out a shape or object, or rhythmic line, or textural or color area. You should not be able to take one thing out of a picture without the whole painting collapsing like a house of cards. If you can remove one or more elements and still be left with an acceptable work of art, it can only mean one of two things. Your senses are not tuned highly enough, or the painting is a bad one in the sense that the artist hasn't carried the intellectual process of composition far enough.

## CONTRAST

Seasoning in painting is directly related to contrast. Contrast not only means the use of various shades of color, it also means contrasts in form, texture, line, rhythm and meaning. To get you thinking in terms of contrast here are five words and their antonyms. The word and its antonym represent the ultimate contrast. Large-Small; Round-Square; Smooth-Rough; Black-White; Calm-Tortured.

See if you can come up with another dozen combinations that are examples of high contrast in as many categories as possible.

In speaking of contrast it is not necessary to always create the greatest possible difference. With some painters, contrast is very subtle and has to do more with meaning and emotion than with actual visual things, so think about contrast in terms not only of big-small, but also in terms of loud-soft and sad-happy.

#### Exercise 1.

Here is a visual problem exploring the principle of contrast. Create a black and white 9" x 12" drawing containing the following elements

1. High, white mountains
2. Black fir trees
3. A dead apple tree
4. Fluffy clouds
5. A white cottage
6. Wavy grass

Consider the contrasts inherent in these elements. High-low, white-black, dead-alive, soft-hard, still-moving.

Proceed now with your drawing, and try to make the most of the contrasts available to you. Do not use line to define form. Use instead, tonal contrast. The cottage should not depend for its visual existence on a line around its form, rather it should be contrasted

against something different in color, or tonality, or texture, or whatever.

Study the example on page 68 after you have finished your drawing.

#### Exercise 2.

Create a larger drawing (any shape or size) of a STORM! It can be any kind of storm - snow or rain, tropical or Yukon blizzard, but it must be as powerful as you can make it. It must be the worst storm of its kind that the world has ever seen. Before you begin, analyze the problem by asking yourself the following questions:

1. Do I have a personal memory of a storm? (Everybody does!)
2. What do I remember particularly about it? The force, the smell of the rain, the direction the trees were bending, the noise.
3. Can I apply any of these particular memory pictures to a visual feeling for line, form, texture, rhythm?
4. What contrasts can I capitalize on to realize my visual statement in a more powerful way first to myself and second to the viewer?

Now begin, and when you are finished, check your results against the one found on page 69.

# DOING

## INTRODUCTION

This third chapter on doing is divided into two parts. It concerns the putting into practice of the heightened awareness that can be gained by doing exercises such as the ones contained in the previous sections.

The first part is a general description of synthetic media, materials and methods. For a more technical and detailed reference book on the subject, may I suggest that you acquire a copy of "Painting with Synthetic media" by Russel O. Woody Jr., which is published by Van Nostrand Reinhold Company. It should be available at most good art supply stores in major centres and can be usefully studied by both the beginner and the accomplished painter who is after highly technical information.

The second section of Chapter 3 is devoted to a step-by-step description of how two paintings evolved from first idea to finished statement. By more fully understanding the creative process as developed by one artist, you may go on to develop your own individual style of working and process of thought.

## THE SYNTHETIC MEDIA

The word most people use to describe chemical or synthetic paints as opposed to traditional organic oil or water color media is acrylics. This is somewhat of a misnomer. The term acrylics applies to the chemical resin that acts as the medium holding the pigment in liquid suspension. When speaking of synthetic paints, one must realize that there are two kinds, acrylic and vinyl paints. As the acrylic type is the more widely used, we shall confine our discussions to this type. So, from this point on, the term acrylics shall be used as the term for synthetic paints with an acrylic resin base.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ACRYLIC PAINTS

During the past two decades there has been a tremendous explosion in the development of synthetic

colors. Artists have had to familiarize themselves with such terms as polymers, oxides, acryloids and silicon esters. To give you an idea of how complicated the subject can be here is a technical definition of acrylic: "A synthetic resin ... acrylate and methacrylate resins are made by polymerizing esters of acrylic and methacrylic acid". Now, if you can understand that fully, you are well on your way to a degree in chemistry. Hopefully, the following information will be more understandable to the uninitiated.

All paints have two essential ingredients - medium and pigment. Synthetic paints use artificially created chemical products as their medium whereas oil paints use organic substances such as linseed oil to suspend the pigment. This chemical media is known as a polymer emulsion which is created by suspending minute quantities of resin, in this case acrylic resin, in water. Therefore, acrylic paints are soluble only in water and can never be mixed with oil paints, or disaster becomes imminent. They can, however, be mixed with water, soluble inks, water colors, pastes, and household water soluble paints.

## TOXICITY

Acrylics are non-toxic and non-flammable, because they are water based and no toxic thinners are used in their application or manufacture. They are therefore exceptionally safe and clean to use and very easy to clean up.

## DRYING PROPERTIES

Acrylics dry by the evaporation of water from the mixture, leaving resin as the binding agent between the pigment and the painting surface. As the water evaporates, the drops of acrylic resin come together to form a virtually indestructible film of plastic. If the mixture of paint is diluted too much with water, the beads of acrylic resin are spread too far apart to come together satisfactorily, so when a very thin mixture of color is needed for glazing or is used as a water color technique, gel medium, matte or gloss mediums must be used to maintain minimum concentration of the resin beads. Used in pure state from the jar, acrylics take ten to fifteen minutes to dry. When the paint is mixed with medium or varnish, its drying time is increased by about ten to fifteen minutes. Heavy impasto paintings take from one to eight hours to form a hard rigid surface. Tube colors dry within thirty minutes. Acrylics can be painted over immediately they are dry to the touch, even when they are thickly applied and still soft underneath.

## DURABILITY

When acrylics are applied properly, and are thoroughly dry or inert, they will not crack, darken, yellow, or peel, and will last indefinitely. Acrylics are a new medium and have not yet been subjected to the test of time but simulated laboratory tests have indicated that synthetic paints will far outlast organically based ones. Some artists go so far as to say that within a generation, the synthetic media will completely take



over from the traditional mediums of oil and water-color and make them obsolete.

## CONSISTENCY

Acrylics are available in tubes and jars. Generally speaking, the tube colors have the consistency of oil paints. The jar colors are thinner and relate in consistency to casein and tempera. Tube colors are much easier to handle, store, and carry on sketching trips. However, because they are closer in texture to oils, they dry more slowly than jar paints. They should be used if the artist wishes to approximate the technique and control he is used to when using oils.

Jar colors are not as buttery as tube colors but are naturally cheaper to buy because you are buying more paint which can be packaged relatively cheaper in jars than in tubes. However, if the artist wishes to increase the thickness of the jar colors, he need only place the lid on upside down. This allows air into the jar, evaporating the water, and thus thickening the paint.

When acrylics dry, they cannot be 'resurrected' as is the case with watercolor and tempera, so rather than putting a great deal of paint on the palette where it will soon dry, use a clean brush to dip into the jar whenever you need more color. Acrylics dry much slower in the opened jar than they do on the palette. Be sure to wipe any excess paint off the rim of the jar before replacing the lid. If you don't, the resin in the paint will act as an almost permanent glue, affixing the lid to the jar. If this happens, run the jar

under hot water and give the lid a few glancing blows with the handle of a kitchen knife. When acrylics do dry in the jar, a thin skin is formed over the surface of the paint. Just peel away that skin and the paint underneath is still usable.

## GLOSS AND MATTE MEDIA

These colorless media appear in the jar as milky in color. However, they do dry crystal clear. They may be mixed with color to give any range of gloss or matte sheen to the color. If more than one-quarter medium to three-quarters color is used, the color tends to become transparent. If opaque color is desired, use it straight from the jar or tube without medium of either type. If a gloss sheen is required it can be obtained by brushing the dried surface with the gloss medium. Matte medium should not be used for this purpose because it may produce a chalky glaze over dark colors.

The first thing you will notice about acrylics if they are new to you, is the fact that the brilliancy of the wet color disappears when the color dries. What seems to be a deliciously juicy and rich painting pales and its intensity diminishes as the water in the paint evaporates. Don't despair. A light brushing with a gloss medium will restore the brilliance to the color permanently. As you work more and more with acrylics you will find that you will begin to compensate as you paint, knowing through experience what the end result will be after application of varnish or medium.

Because of the durability of acrylic colors, it is hard-



Ron Bolt, PRE-CAMBRIAN VARIATION NO. 1,  $30\frac{1}{4}" \times 38\frac{1}{4}"$

ly necessary to varnish a finished acrylic painting in order to protect the surface. However, in order to protect thin glazed and watered-down color, or to unify the overall surface glosses of the painting, varnishes may be used.

Varnishing will also intensify color, return its brilliance, and deepen the translucent quality of glazes.

Varnish can be applied in two ways, brushed on or applied from a spray can. If you are using the first method, you can gently stroke the varnish on with a soft brush as rapidly and smoothly as possible. In the case of heavy impasto paintings, it may become necessary to dab the varnish on, working it into the cracks and crevices. Do small sections at a time, as the varnish dries quickly and must not be stroked when partially dry or it will begin to pick up the texture of the brush. You will find that you will have no trouble blending in or joining up a wet new section of varnished picture with a portion that is already dry. Varnishes look milky when first applied but don't panic, as they dry crystal clear and create a brilliant transparent film that will never yellow or change the color of the paintings they are protecting. You may also buy varnishes in spray cans. This is the method I prefer because my work has a very smooth surface of glazed and/or watered down color that could be disturbed through brushing. I also tend to work quite large, sometimes up to 5 x 8 feet in size. This is a huge surface to deal with using the conventional brush method and is quite time consuming. Spray varnish gives me a very even coat. I can still adjust gloss by spraying longer in certain areas. Above all, I save

valuable time that can be better spent working on new paintings.

## GEL MEDIUM

One may also use this medium which is again milky in color and the consistency of mayonnaise. It dries clear and is used to approximate the feeling of working with oil colors. You may use it by mixing it directly with the colors before application, or by covering the surface of the painting with it and painting into it with color straight from the tube. Gel medium, when mixed with acrylic paints, causes them to dry with a gloss. If desired, this gloss can be eliminated by varnishing when dry with a matte varnish.

## SYNTHETIC GESSO

Synthetic gesso is readily available in all art stores in pint, quart and gallon containers. It is a wonder material. It dries instantly and is capable of producing any texture that one can desire to paint on. It is tough and durable, and seals canvas threads instantly, protecting them against rip and damage indefinitely. It can also be used on illustration board as a base for watercolors, or as an interesting drawing surface. Various materials can be added to it to create sculptural and textural possibilities as wide as your imagination. Such materials include sand, marble dust, wall-paper paste, fibre glass strips or particles, and modelling paste. The intense white of synthetic gesso will not diminish with age, and adds extra brilliance to thin, watered-down paints and glazes.

# SUMMATION OF THE ACRYLIC MEDIUM

If used properly, synthetic paints have greater versatility, brilliance of color, speed of handling, and longevity than any paint medium yet developed. As well as having the capacity to be used in exactly the same way as oil or watercolor paints, acrylics may also be used in printing processes, as sculptural material, as bas-relief, and in collage. Its uses in the visual arts are almost limitless and every day artists are discovering new ways of using it. It is truly science and technology's greatest gift to the visual arts.

As this book is concerned with landscape painting, I think it best to confine our investigation of acrylics to their use as a modern and highly advantageous replacement of the traditional oil and watercolor methods.

## ADVANTAGES OF ACRYLICS OVER OILS

The main advantage of acrylics over other media, especially oils, is their quick and even drying time. To be fair, oils because of their slow drying times, permit manipulation and blending of color right on the

canvas, but as I will be explaining later, the drying time and viscosity of acrylics can be altered if you wish. The difference is that even if you alter their characteristics temporarily, cracking and peeling of the paint at a later date will not be a problem. It will be with oils, however, unless you are careful.

The hobbyist is obviously not particularly worried at the prospect of his work cracking and peeling twenty years from now. Professionals should be aware of this possibility, but most of them don't seem to care. How many will wait the necessary three months for undercoating of reasonably thick oil color to dry before resuming work on the painting? How many will wait a further three months after the painting is finished to varnish it? If one coat of oil paint is applied over another that is not thoroughly dry, it will crack over a period of time. Because the underlying surface is still drying and thus contracting, pressures are put on the top layer resulting in cracks.

This problem does not apply in using acrylics. An undercoating of acrylic paint, depending on its thickness, will dry in from five minutes to two hours, allowing the artist to resume painting immediately.

With oil paints, some colors, depending on the amount of oil or medium present, take longer to dry than others. Because of this fact, the artist should ideally plan his process of working very carefully. With a very detailed knowledge of the composition of all the colors he is using he should avoid applying a 'lean' color containing little oil, over top of a 'fat' or very slow drying color. Therefore the factor of varying



drying times should be considered by the artist while an oil painting is still underway, if he wishes to avoid cracking and peeling.

All acrylic paints, regardless of color, dry at the same speed. There are no varying time factors to contend with when using acrylic or synthetic paints.

Other advantages include:

1. Great transparency. Water is clearer than oil.
2. Acrylics will not yellow or change color with age.
3. Acrylic resins form a permanent film for the pigment, ensuring far greater permanence for the painting.
4. Acrylics adhere to canvas to a much greater degree than oils. Some synthetic mediums were originally invented for use as adhesives and because of this fact, acrylic medium makes an excellent glue when working with collage.

I have found when talking with students who are just beginning to use acrylics that they become very disenchanted with the medium because of its quick drying time. To me, this characteristic of acrylics forces the artist to train himself to be much more organized in his thinking before he applies paint to canvas. Even if the results are not to his liking, the artist can over-paint in a matter of minutes on a completely dry surface rather than going through the messy and demor-

alizing process of scraping and wiping off wet oil paint. Paintings can proceed at a rapid rate when the idea in the artist's mind is still hot or vivid. He doesn't have to wait for days while an undercoating dries and the original idea slowly loses its intensity.

## USE OF ACRYLICS AS OILS

Very few people begin their painting career with acrylics, but come to discover them after having worked a long time with oils. Because of this, they begin to use acrylics as oils. There is nothing wrong with this process, but hopefully as the artist progresses in his understanding of the acrylic medium, he will begin to exploit it for its own inherent differences and characteristics. Most people equate the use of acrylics with the hard edge school of painting. It is true that because of their brilliance of color and evenness of application, acrylics do lend themselves admirably to this type of painting. On the other hand they have a great capacity to achieve tremendously deep and luminous glazes that seem to glow from within. This is an aspect of acrylics that has been little explored but offers great rewards. So, for the painter used to oils and contemplating the exploration of acrylics, here is the easy way into the subject -- how to use acrylics as you would oils.

The basic secrets are two.

Firstly, use the tubed acrylic colors. These usually allow you one day's working time and they dry over night, so you can still manipulate color directly on the canvas.

Ron Bolt  
PRE-CAMBRIAN  
VARIATION NO. 2  
 $50\frac{1}{2}" \times 50\frac{1}{4}"$



Secondly, mix the tube colors with gel medium. This slows their drying time and acts the same as linseed oil does with oils. Gel increases the viscosity of the acrylics. With or without gel, the tubed colors are stiff enough to show brush strokes and be applied with a palette knife for heavy textural painting.

You may wish to use modelling paste with the tubed colors instead of gel medium. However, the paste does tend to dull or tint the color if used in a ratio above one part paste to three parts color. Modelling paste is useful for a very heavily textured painting but should not be used on supports other than untempered masonite. I have seen acrylic paintings that are identical to the appearance and feel of a fine oil painting and have even been exhibited as such. However, acrylics do have their own characteristics and they will inevitably change your ways of working and planning even if at first you use them to try and imitate oils. Don't fight the slow changes that will come about naturally when you use acrylics. I am willing to bet that when you become proficient in them you will never go back to oils other than to have a technical holiday.

## USE OF ACRYLICS AS WATERCOLOR

Well diluted with water, acrylics can be used in exactly the same fashion as the traditional tubed watercolor paints. The only difference is that acrylics are permanent when dry and cannot be reworked as ordinary watercolors can. This at first seems a disadvantage but on the other hand, because of their permanence, acrylics allow for additional washes of transparent color

over dried areas thus giving you a chance to glaze in a watercolor medium. You can also tone down the intensity of certain areas or create atmospheric effects.

The same brushes are used as with ordinary watercolor technique but you have the added advantage of being able to use heavy bristle brushes and any other tool you can invent. Feel free to use sponges, paper towelling, or whatever your imagination suggests. Because of their consistency and brilliance, acrylics lend themselves to almost any method of application you can dream up.

When used as a watercolor medium, acrylics do not tend to buckle watercolor paper as much as traditional watercolor pigments do because less water and more medium is usually employed. For this reason, watercolor paper does not have to be prestretched. If the paper does buckle in the middle of painting, wait until it is dry, and wet the back of the paper. Sponge off the excess water and put the paper under even pressure for a few days. A piece of masonite or plywood slightly bigger than the paper, weighted down with an even distribution of long-winded novels, will do the trick.

All the usual watercolor tricks can be used with acrylics. These include drop out or resist techniques using waxes, rubber cement, crayons, or oil pastels, scraping with penknife or pins, and rubbing with light sandpaper. The possibilities are limited only by your own imagination.

One last advantage I would like to point out regarding the use of acrylics, is this. If you tend to work in both

oils and watercolors and use the same working area to do so, you are obviously aware of the fact that you have to be exceedingly careful in cleaning up after oil painting. If the slightest bit of oil paint is left lying around, it inevitably seems to find its way onto your lovely, clean, and often very expensive piece of watercolor paper with disastrous results. Because water is the only medium needed for acrylics whether they are used as oils or as watercolors, this problem is eliminated.

Before going on to a description of various tools used in acrylic painting, one final word--about colors. When you come to buy acrylic colors in the store you will be faced with some bewildering terms. These include phthalocyanine or 'phthalo' colors, which are blues and greens using organic pigments and are closely related to Prussian blue and viridian in oil colors. There are many other examples of technical names for colors and rather than get into them at this point, I again refer you to Russel Woody Jr's book on the subject of synthetic media. Just be forewarned that the whole subject tends to appear very technical and intimidating. However, a helpful salesperson can usually steer you to acrylic colors of the same hue as oil colors although they may have different and highly confusing names.

## PAINTING SURFACES

Masonite - Masonite is cheap, quick to prepare and almost indispensable when working with very heavy impastos or heavily sculptured (bas-relief) surfaces. It is rigid enough to support very heavy applications of paint. If a more flexible surface such as canvas is used, the paint could, with movement of the canvas, lose its grip on the surface and fall off. Be sure to get the tempered masonite which is readily available at all building supply stores and lumber yards. Most lumber yards sell masonite in 4' x 4' or 4' x 8' pieces but for a small additional charge they will cut it to your specifications. One danger to look out for is warping. This can be partly alleviated by sealing the back surface with shellac or other sealant and strapping it with dried 1" x 2" pine strips. However, masonite seems a very perverse sort of material and will sometimes warp in spite of all precautions.

To prepare the masonite for painting, sand it lightly to roughen its smoother surface to allow the gesso a better grip on the surface. The sandings can then be dumped into the gesso if a more textured surface is desired. You can apply gesso with a brush or a roller or a combination of both. If a weaved canvas-like surface is wanted, brush a coat of gesso on in one direction only. When the first coat has dried, brush on the second coat in



a direction at right angles to the first coat. Since I prefer a smooth surface, I brush the gesso on and then roll it smooth with the paint roller.

**Cardboard** - Heavy cardboard, a very inexpensive material and something you can probably scrounge from around the house, makes a very good lightweight sketching panel when a coat of gesso is applied to its surface. A maximum size of 12" x 15" is recommended again because of warping problems.

**Canvas** - Canvas comes in many textures, weights and types -- cotton, linen, burlap, cheese cloth applied to boards, synthetic fibres such as orlon, and sail cloth. The canvas may be raw and untreated, or already prepared with an organic or synthetic gesso. I use very heavy duck cotton canvas already prepared with a synthetic gesso. Organic gessos, over a period of time, tend to become unstable and even rot the canvas. The type of canvas that is prepared is easier to stretch because the weave is sealed and immovable. With unprepared canvas one must be very careful to apply even pressure with every pull of the stretching pliers or the result will be a stretched canvas with a crooked, meandering weave.

If the canvas is already prepared, why give it another coat of gesso? I do this for two reasons. My painting style in many instances relies on glazing and a building up of transparent colors. The color of prepared canvas is never as white as a freshly applied coat of gesso. This extreme

whiteness lends brilliance to the build-up of transparent color. Secondly, because I originally began painting on masonite panels, I am uncomfortable with a heavily textured canvas. With gesso one can subtly alter the surface and refine it by filling in the cracks and crevices to produce the degree of smoothness one requires. After applying the liquid gesso with a brush first and then smoothing it with a roller, I sometimes give it a light rubbing with fine sandpaper for added smoothness.

You may have occasions when you want a very heavily painted surface, thick enough perhaps to have a sculptural quality. However, if you still wish to take advantage of the surface feeling of canvas, it can be glued to a more rigid surface such as masonite or plywood before painting begins. The pure gel medium makes an excellent, non-staining permanent glue for this purpose.

**Brushes** - I have three brushes that I use almost exclusively. For laying in large areas of color I use a 3" nylon bristle brush which can be acquired very cheaply at any hardware store. For smaller areas, I have a 1" chisel edge nylon acrylic brush, and for small detail a #2 pointed sable hair brush. Many other types are available through catalogues and art supply stores, but don't go out and spend a fortune. You really don't need any more than three or four different sizes and tips to start with.

You will find that acrylic paint is very hard on brushes, particularly the small pointed variety. The point quickly disappears and depending on

Ron Bolt  
PRE-CAMBRIAN  
VARIATION NO. 3  
46 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 41 $\frac{1}{2}$ "



your financial state at the time, you either have to buy a new one or get your hair-cutting scissors working to restore the point on the old one. In any case, wash and dry the brushes thoroughly after use, or in the case of large brushes, leave them immersed in clean water.

Rollers - These are available in many sizes from a 3" width right up to a 12" width. They are indispensable when laying in large areas of paint that must be completely flat and even and free of any marks or brush strokes. They may also be used with diluted color to get interesting textural effects.

Ron Bolt  
THE NAMELESS HOUR NO. 13  
30 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ "



**Paper Towelling** - This is extremely useful in mopping up, and cleaning brushes, although newspaper can be used. If cloth rags are used, the acrylic dries very hard and makes the rags rigid and unusable. Use something you can throw away.

You can continue to be creative while you're cleaning up. Interesting effects can be created by crumpling up the towelling and dipping it or rolling it into paint wetly applied to the painting surface.

**Masking Tape** - This material is available in a variety of widths from  $\frac{1}{4}$ " to 2". It can save you an immense amount of time and work if used properly. For those readers who do not know, you will be interested to discover that those hard-edged paintings with their perfectly straight lines and edges are done with the help of masking tape. A color is laid down slightly larger in area than it is intended to be when completed. When the color is dry (usually in 15 minutes or so) the tape is laid directly on top of it pressing it down so the fresh paint will not crawl underneath the tape. The color that is to be adjacent to the one already applied is now added with a roller or brush. The paint is applied directly over top of the tape, taking care not to get it on the dried surface of the other color. When the second color is dry, (if it is very thick color it does not need to be dry) the tape is removed and a clean, hard, perfectly straight line separating the two colors is achieved. Curves can also be created merely by bending the tape to the desired shape as it is being laid down on the canvas.

You can later capitalize on these effects and turn them into rock, grass, clouds, etc. After continual experimentation you get to know exactly what effect you can create when you need it.

**Palettes** - Heavy pieces of cardboard coated with acrylic gesso make good throw-away palettes for sketching trips. They can't be cleaned because to do so would just rip the cardboard. However, if you catch the paint when it is still wet and wipe the palette clean, it can be repainted with gesso and used again.

A more permanent studio palette is a large piece of clear glass placed over a painted white surface. When the colors harden and you wish to clean the palette, just moisten the surface with water, wait five minutes and use a sharp metal scraper to clean away the loosened dried paint.





# ANALYSIS OF TWO PAINTINGS

We've arrived at the last section of this book -- the analysis of the process that went into the creation of two paintings. Before we begin the difficult job of dissecting such a very personal and subjective thing as a creative process let's go back one step to the initial way one becomes intrigued enough with a subject to go through all the turmoil of interpreting it for himself. In my case, this takes the form of sketching with a camera.

When I run out of ideas or have finished a series of paintings and am seemingly empty of inspiration, I buy a roll of 35 mm color slide film, pack my camera and take off. Sometimes I go to the country. Sometimes I just roam around the city or even my back yard. This is my form of sketching or note-taking.

In most cases I paint directly from the 35 mm slides as projected in my studio. Personally, I enjoy having the opportunity, through the camera, to take home a piece of the landscape. In the studio, I can study the slide at my leisure. I can give the color my unhurried consideration. I can toy with the composition by blocking off sections of the slide with masking tape. I can project the slide on to the wall and get a blow-up for

a really close look at rock textures, water patterns, or cloud formations. With the camera you can freeze immediate reality, package it up and take it home. You don't have to rely on sketches and perhaps miss a lot of subtleties that could have started you off on a whole new train of thought later in the studio.

Another advantage the camera has over sketching is that you can instantly particularize the landscape. Many beginners are terrified of sketching outdoors because it seems so complicated and overwhelming. They wander around all day trying to decide what to sketch. Because the image you see through the camera has definite boundaries, you can look at your surroundings a section at a time and sort out what first seems an immense jungle of overlapping forms and colors. When you look through the camera, you compress what you see into a definite shape. Relating back to the discussion of composition, that compression causes pressures to emerge within the shape. As a result, you begin to notice relationships of form and rhythm more obviously and more quickly than you would if you had to sort them out from the total image you see with the unaided eye.

The same process can be achieved by looking through holes of different shapes cut out of pieces of cardboard.

Please don't think that I dismiss sketching altogether. Exciting things can happen in a sketch. Unfortunately, sometimes that initial excitement that one captures is lost or intellectualized to death when the sketch is transferred to canvas. The camera allows me to bring home the subject and begin to paint it right away in

comfort. Therefore any excitement that might have been captured in a sketch is hopefully allowed to jump right on to the canvas.

## THE CREATIVE PROCESS

The process of creative thinking is different with every artist and is very closely bound up with the individual artist's way of working, or the physical work of painting a picture. Therefore, it is difficult to describe the creative process in words that do not end up sounding artificial or very pompous. Perhaps the easiest way to describe it would be to say that it is a constant series of judgements and decisions. Some are made consciously and deliberately. Some are made as a reaction to something that has happened accidentally with the medium you are using. Some are unconscious decisions made almost in opposition to your original concept. Other decisions and judgements relate to what might have been done in a previous painting or are the outcome of a developed personal style of painting. Paintings also have a tendency to grow on their own. Half-way towards completion, the painting may take on a meaning or direction completely removed from what you, the artist, had planned originally. If that happens, don't get upset. Let it happen. Let the painting talk to you. On the other hand, the

artist can allow the painting too much leeway and not impose enough of his own intellect and powers of judgement on it. In this case the painting becomes too emotional and falls off the edge into oblivion.

I never trust a painting that is supposedly finished. I always try to leave a painting around the studio for several weeks after I think that I can't do anything more with it. Strange things have been known to happen during this time of limbo. The painting sometimes begins to irritate me in some way.

At first, it is impossible to pinpoint the irritation because it's too soon after that series of very intense judgements and decisions mentioned above. But sooner or later the painting begins to shout, "This color is wrong here!" or "The rhythm stops here!" Through this process of living with a painting, you know over a period of time when that painting is finished or when it is beyond redemption.

Having verbally generalized a sometimes exhilarating, sometimes agonizing, always mysterious process, perhaps the following visual analysis will be more comprehensible and to the point. Remember again, that this is my own process of working, and not a guide to painting a good picture.

# ANALYSIS OF THE PAINTING "WINTERROCK"

On the following page is a photograph of a 35mm color slide--the result of a sketching trip in the country. What first attracted me to this subject was the beautifully sculptured forms of the snow as created by winds and drifting. These forms suggested to me a driving and forward rhythmic power almost as if the rock had been pushed through the snow by some giant hand. Only when I got home and studied the projected image more closely, did I appreciate the more subtle aspects of the texture involved.

Here, as far as I can recall, and keeping in mind that many aspects of painting happen naturally and subconsciously, is a step-by-step series of decisions and judgements that I went through to arrive at the finished painting as shown below.

## Step 1.

Firstly I wanted to capitalize on that dominant forward diagonal rhythm. To do that it became

obvious that the overall shape of the picture had to be changed from the original proportions of the slide. The shapes and rhythms would live more happily together within an overall shape that was narrower and longer than the original slide shape. (See drawing) I usually have a variety of sizes and shapes of canvas already made up in the studio, and I picked the one that would work best.

## Step 2.

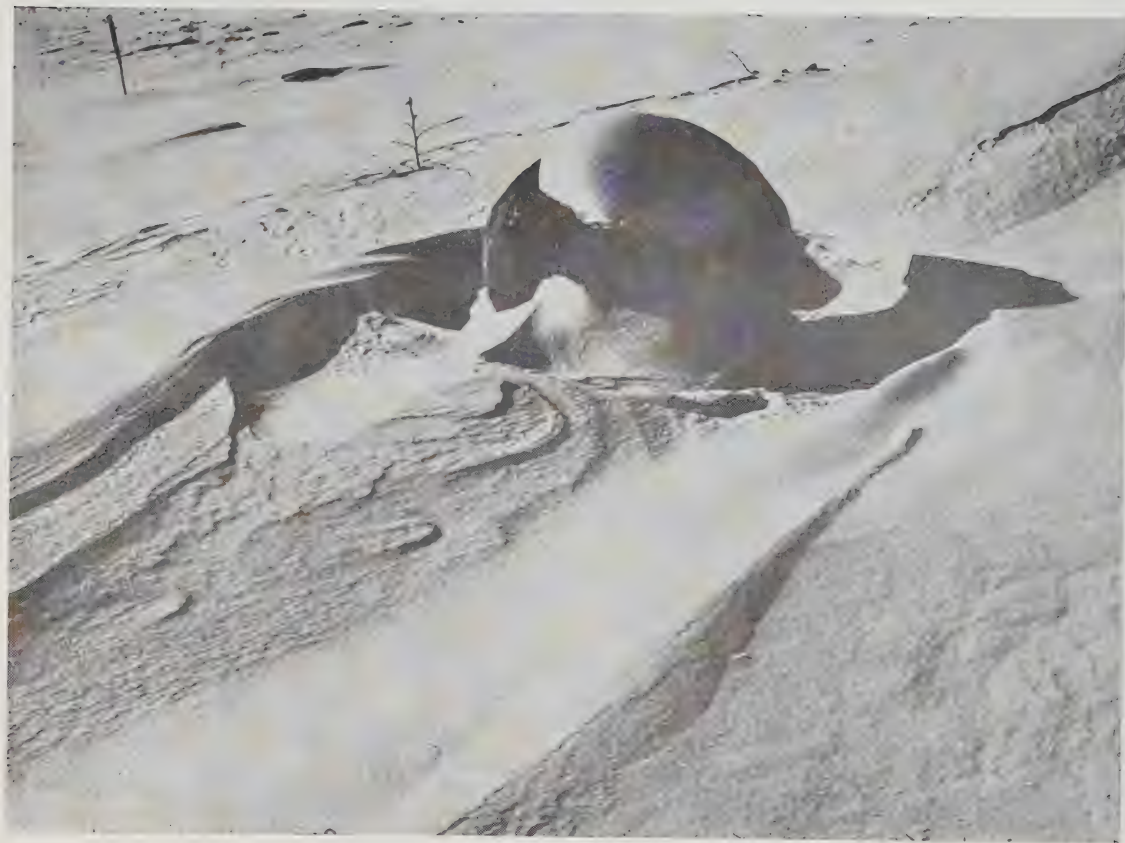
Before beginning to paint, I gave the canvas a coat of acrylic gesso using a wide brush and a roller as described in the section on materials and methods.

## Step 3.

Now came the hardest step of all -- the initial screwing up of courage needed to invade that beautiful hunk of clean white canvas. The first consideration was where to place the main focus of attention, in this case, the rock. There were many subtle choices. (See drawing)

## Step 4.

After placing the canvas on a flat table, I placed a very wet blob of paint on the canvas, approximately where I wanted it and then rolled paper towelling over it to suggest texture (See materials and methods.)





#### Step 5.

The overall shapes of the blue-grey shadows were added with consideration to the overall rhythm. Why I put them exactly where they appear and changed their shapes subtly is a matter of training and an almost subconscious decision. They felt right being where they were.



#### Step 6.

After the largest and most obvious shapes were placed, the rest of the canvas was covered with titanium white and a bit of cobalt blue mixed in a very wet solution of water and gel medium and applied with the roller. The roller's surface created subtle and varied accidental textures. You can see so far that I am still working very wetly and loosely, consciously making decisions regarding the placing of large basic shapes and unconsciously manipulating the roller and paper towelling letting them suggest things. This is very close to using acrylics as one uses water-color paints.

#### Step 7.

During the process of listening to what the painting was saying, it became apparent that the rock was the wrong shape, even though its shape was very close to the rock in the actual photograph. It seemed too round to be comfortable within the horizontal shape of the canvas, so I made it more oval by cutting away at it with the white of the surrounding snow and the blue-grey of the shadows.

#### Step 8.

A major decision came next and that was a matter of scale. Where was the rock sitting in relation to its surroundings? At this point I could have introduced some of the grasses sticking through the snow in the background, but that would only serve

to suggest that the rock was not that big -- which it wasn't. Therefore to make the rock reasonably large and powerful and to still place it in some sort of perspective with its surroundings, I picked up on a diagonal line above the rock that had emerged quite accidentally when laying in the background with the roller. This accidental line became a ridge of a hill with a slightly darker shape behind it suggesting a dip in the ground and a series of ongoing hills. I considered too, that this triangular shape could be sky but that seemed too obvious. Better to suggest hills and maintain a certain mystery. Let the viewer wonder, "Is that a big dip in the ground or a hillside or what?" A good painting sometimes doesn't visually explain everything, but lets the viewer interpret whatever he will.

#### Step 9.

Now the real work began. I mentioned earlier that when I studied the slide at home blown up on the wall, I noticed many very subtle textures. Apart from the shadow shapes of the large drifts, most of the snow surface was covered with many smaller swirls and eddies that tended to create an overall texture. These big white areas (negative space) were becoming boring to me, although they did serve as good contrast to the smaller shapes or positive space. I therefore decided to introduce texture to the large areas to give them visual interest while being careful not to break them up, causing confusion with the smaller main interest shapes.

#### Step 10.

Using a #2 sable brush, I began the laborious process of capitalizing on the surface already created by the texture of the roller. This took two days.

#### Step 11.

Now back to the main shapes. The color was too dense in the shadows. Transparent blue-white and brown-white glazes were added to give the dark shadows life. Shadows if not handled properly become holes in the composition. This consideration relates back to our discussion of shadows in the section on color.

#### Step 12.

While working with the shadows to give them life, they began to change form slightly, so I then went back a few steps and again related large shapes to smaller ones, deliberately refining the shapes to change their rhythm slightly.

### Step 13.

The texture of the rock originally created by the paper towelling trick was now confusing and redundant. It had to go -- or at least be much refined. Again using the sable brush, I consolidated the texture and smoothed it out. The rock was still hard and rough and cold, but its overall texture fitted better within the context of the whole picture.

The painting was almost done.



### Step 14.

The triangular shape of the hill in the upper left corner was not right in color. It needed to be darkened. The texture was already there, so to make the shape darker but at the same time not lose the texture, I applied a thin transparent glaze of water, medium and cobalt blue. This darkened the shape, retained the texture and gave the area an added brilliance and depth that it had lacked previously.

Click! The painting was finished. (Or was it?) It sat around for a week quite happily. It's still happy and so am I. Of course, I could tinker with it but to do so would only create a whole new set of problems.



Ron Bolt, WINTERROCK, acrylic on canvas



# ANALYSIS OF THE PAINTING "SPRING CHESTNUTS"

Opposite this page is the original slide shot at the corner of Church and Queen Streets in Toronto

I was attracted to this subject for many reasons -- all emotional, sensual ones. Firstly, the lacy intricate positive-negative, black-white pattern was interesting from a visual point of view. Secondly, it was a rotten spring day, drizzly, cold and breezy, but in the air was the fresh smell of growing things, and the strange aroma of damp earth and wet pavement. Both had been frozen all winter and now were giving way to the energy of spring. I could also hear the traffic whizzing by in all directions, which was rather incongruous. I spent the rest of the afternoon wandering about that small patch of park space in the middle of a bustling city, shooting slides of trees against the sky, bits of grass pushing up through the cracks in the pavement and generally enjoying the fact that winter was definitely over and spring was on its way.

When the slides were developed and studied, I was still most interested in 'Spring Chestnuts' and decided to explore the idea on canvas. Thinking back

to the day I took this shot and remembering the smell of the ground and the dampness and the dull subtle color, I was committed to reproduce all these feelings and come to terms with them through the process of painting. I began by considering composition, picked a suitable canvas, and prepared it exactly as described previously. I chose this shape because, as you can see by comparing the slide photo with the finished painting, I cropped the two sides and bottom slightly. I did this to compress the energy and movement inherent in the branches. If this had not been done, I felt that the interest would dribble out the sides and bottom.

I then returned to the process of sorting out what I wanted the painting to say and how I was technically going to say it.

## Step 1.

Because the feelings of spring and new life were predominant, I saw no reason to make any reference to the city. After all, what difference would it make if the tree were in the city or the country? Besides, the hydro pole in the background was only disturbing and complicating the basic pattern of the tree branches. It was deleted.

## Step 2.

I had to decide on the overall color of the background or sky. The color as I remembered it was a cold grey-blue, but because the smells of spring were still fresh in my mind, that coldness seemed inappropriate. The color was changed to a warmer,

damper, brown-blue-grey color which turned out to be a mixture of raw umber, a dab of Prussian blue and titanium white. The whole canvas was covered with a thick mixture of paint and gel medium using the roller again for maximum flatness and evenness.

### Step 3.

Now for the drawing on top of the colored sky. After studying the slide for a long while, it seemed silly for me to even attempt to draw it. After all, I had captured it in the slide, why draw it all over

again? I decided to project the slide directly onto the canvas and trace the branch patterns with brush and paint. When the sun went down, the projector was set up at one end of the studio and the easel and canvas at the other. A dark brown color was mixed to approximate the color I eventually wanted, the projector was turned on and I began the laborious job of tracing the patterns.

At this point you probably are thinking, "That seems very easy. All he's doing is reproducing the slide in a larger size. It seems an easy process. You don't even have to be able to draw. It's cheating!"



Things are never as simple as they seem.

#### Step 4.

In the photo you will notice that the branches seem to have no form or roundness. They present a more or less flat two-dimensional pattern. Originally that was the feeling I wanted to retain in the painting, but as the pattern was being traced very sketchily and quickly, things began to happen. Because of the wetness of the paint and the speed of working, accidental forms began to emerge. These accidents made the pattern more three-dimensional and much more interesting. I also bumped into the problem of what was overlapping what. Which branches were in the foreground and which bent away to the background.

#### Step 5.

After the roughing in of the pattern was completed, the projector was turned off and the painting viewed under ordinary indoor light. Everything had changed!

#### Step 6.

The next morning I began a total reassessment of the direction of the painting including an analysis of rhythms, forms, and overall composition.

#### Step 7.

Various accidental densities of the dark brown branch colors were used to create a light direction (from above) giving the branches form and roundness.

#### Step 8.

Branches sorted themselves out as to overlapping and a more interesting three-dimensional effect was achieved.

#### Step 9.

Major and minor rhythms and directions were accentuated. Branches were thinned or thickened, eliminated or added.

#### Step 10.

At this point I thought I was almost finished. All that was needed was added contrast between the prickly chestnuts and the sinuous flowing branches, as well as the addition of some texture to the branches to heighten their sense of form. All this could be done at my leisure. The main problems were over. I laid the painting aside for a few days.

Slowly it began to irritate me. The background, even though it was broken up considerably by the overlaying pattern, was boring. It was all one flat color. The sense of light direction added to the branches didn't jive with this overall flatness. Big problem!

#### Step 11.

Decided to lighten portions of the background to give the sky dimension. The obvious place to introduce lighter tone was the top of the canvas



Ron Bolt, SPRING CHESTNUTS, acrylic on canvas



where the light seemed to be emanating from, but the obvious answer is not always the best one. As was stated at the beginning of this book, don't take anything for granted. Look and then look again. I decided to introduce lighter tones at the bottom of the canvas, giving the painting an upward lift.

After all, the viewer is looking up through the trees. This also created a more mysterious feeling of illumination. The real source must be coming from some place beyond the painting, behind the viewer.

I used the roller to roll on a white glaze and blended it in halfway up into the overall sky tone. The use of the thin transparent glaze allowed the branches to show through and not disappear. I had to repaint them but it wasn't necessary to go through the process of tracing them all over again.

#### Step 12.

By making the bottom portion of the sky lighter, the top portion of the sky seemed weak, so a darker glaze was applied and blended in from the top down. The whole character of the sky and the feeling of light had changed. I therefore proceeded to finish the painting.

#### Step 13.

Contrast was heightened by adding sharp spikes to the chestnuts and accentuating the fluidity of the branches with a fine brush.

#### Step 14.

Texture was applied by means of small strokes of lighter and darker color to the branches.

#### Step 15.

With the addition of texture to the branches, the background still needed something. I decided to pull the dotted texture of the branches into the background, so with heavy opaque white I began to echo that stippled effect on the branches in the sky.

#### Step 16.

Proceeding with this slow tedious process, rhythms began to emerge in the background. I remembered the windy feeling of the day on which I took the photograph and decided to introduce some definite swooping diagonal lines to the background. Not only did this create movement and a breezy feeling, it became a means of contrasting the vertical lines of the branches with a diagonal motion. Everything was now tied together. The painting was finished. A spray of acrylic varnish intensified the color and gave an overall even gloss to the total surface.

# SUMMARY

Let us summarize the methods that are fundamental to creating a painting.

1. Think of what the painting is about. Think of its mood, its point of view. Why do you want to paint it?
2. All parts of the painting surface are dependent on and relate to all other parts. No point on the surface is unimportant. Every square inch of it is worthy of the most serious consideration and constant questioning.
3. If you change something in one section of the painting, whether it be color or the composition, the texture or the form, it will have an effect on another part of the picture. In other words, try to consider the whole painting at once. This process can be likened to developing a photograph in a tray of developing fluid. One part of the photo does not pop out fully finished ahead of any other part. The whole photo slowly emerges at the same rate on all parts of its surface.
4. Work from large basic shapes and gradually break them up and add smaller ones. Get the overall composition established in relation to the shape of the canvas.

5. Cover the entire surface of the painting as quickly as you can with large washes of color. Get rid of that stark whiteness of the canvas. You can't begin to relate colors to each other as long as there is white left on the surface.
6. Use the principle of contrast for emotional purposes and visual interest.
7. Listen to the painting as it is emerging. It might change your mind for the better.
8. Don't trust a painting that is 'finished'. Live with it for a while, even though someone else might tell you it is good.

# CONCLUSION

The basic approach to painting that I have tried to make clear in this book should now be reiterated. Here are three paragraphs for your consideration.

1. Painting is an emotional thing first. One is attracted to a subject through one or more of his senses. The more one's senses are trained in how to see and experience what the landscape has to say, the greater will be the opportunity for expression.

2. Because of the force of the initial sensual excitement, the artist is motivated to more fully understand and come to terms with his emotions about his surroundings by transferring his excitement to canvas. In that transference the powers of intellect, training and craftsmanship are brought into play. The more you paint, using your capacities for judgement and decision, the more freedom of expression you will gain.
3. Finally, painting, or any creative process, is fundamentally a mystery. Many longer and certainly more profound books than this one have attempted to explain that mystery, but it becomes all very academic. You are you, and your methods are your own. If you are already engaged in painting you know how frustrating it can be. You can never technically achieve what you set out to do even if you spend your whole working life at it. But don't ever lose that sense of joy and mystery that comes when you attempt to express your feelings about the world around you, because in the last analysis that is what art is all about.

Good Luck!

# ILLUSTRATIONS

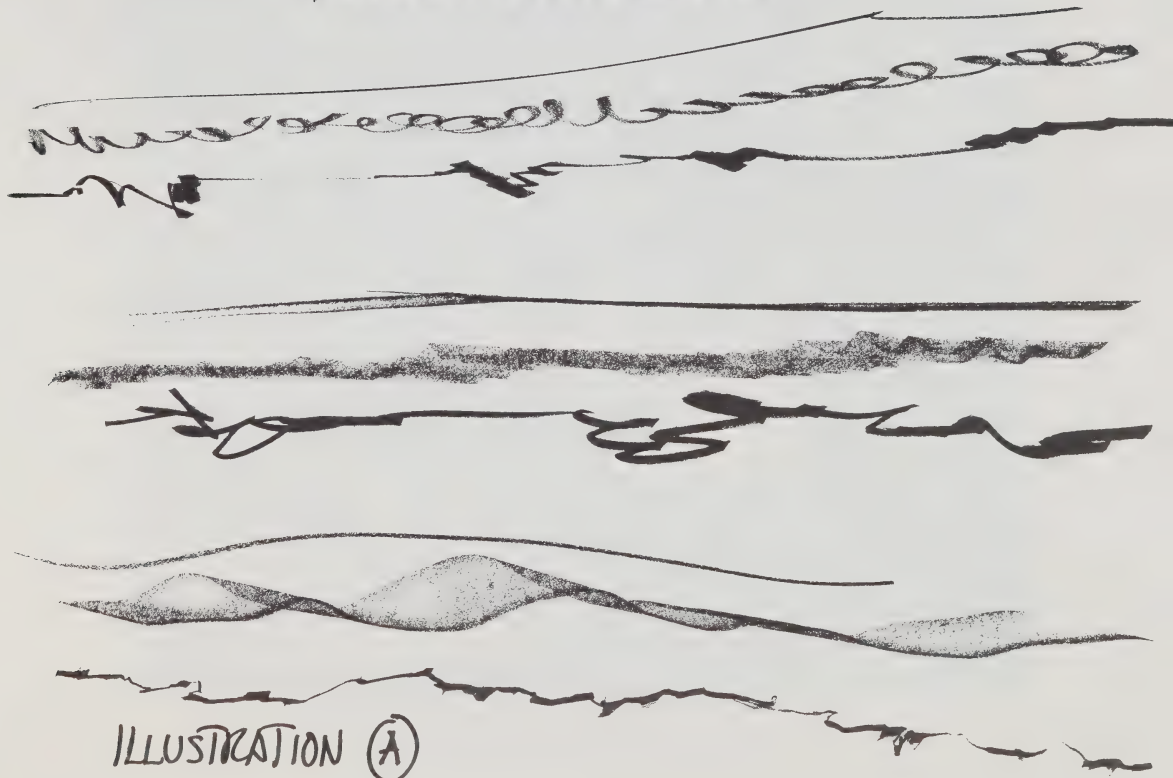


ILLUSTRATION (A)



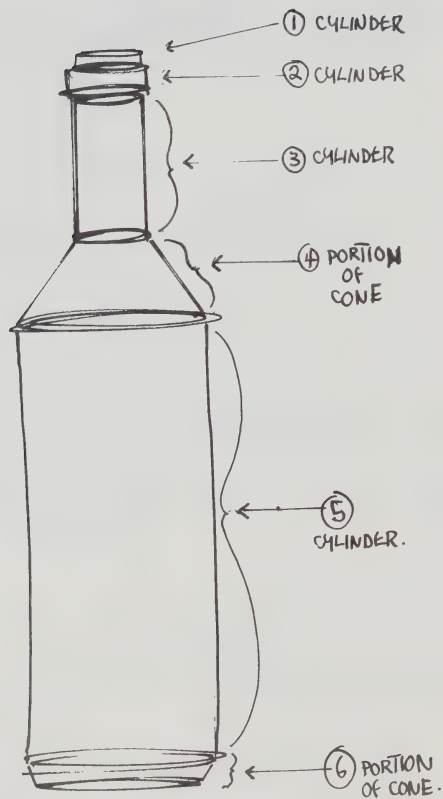
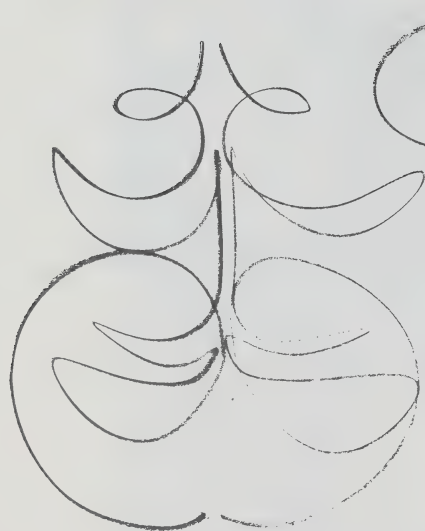


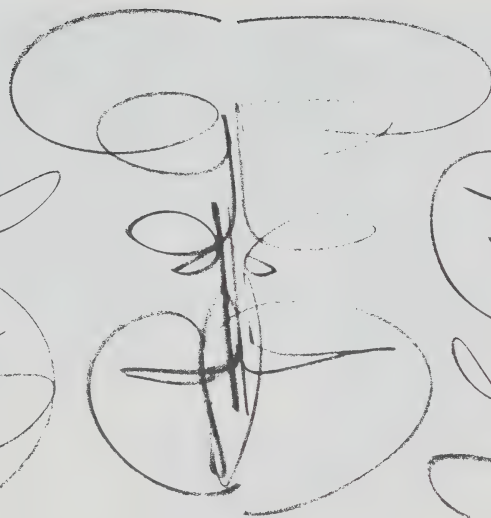
ILLUSTRATION. (B)



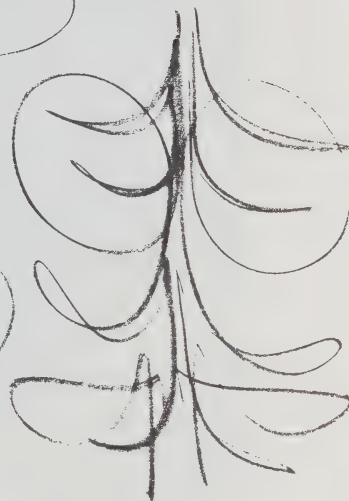
### ILLUSTRATION (C)



1



2.



3.

ILLUSTRATION (D.)



1



2



3

ILLUSTRATION (f)





ILLUSTRATION (F)

Illustration ⑦









